

Occupy Christmas: Mark 13: 24-37
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Occupy Christmas is the latest incarnation of the campaign by *Adbusters*, the Vancouver-based magazine that inspired the Occupy Wall Street movement. This same magazine has been promoting “Buy Nothing Day” for several years – a movement to bring a halt to over consumption and the environmental and cultural catastrophes that accompany our voracious appetite for more and more of creation’s limited resources. *Adbusters* most recent campaign is ‘Occupy Christmas’ – a call to resist the hyper consumption of the holiday season and return to the initial spiritual impetus of this time of year. The magazine is getting all the credit –but Christians and other faith communities have been on about this for decades!

Occupy Christmas and Mark’s apocalyptic call to attentiveness that we just heard read actually have a lot in common. Both appeal to those who feel cut off from the surrounding culture; both offer strategies for those who feel powerless, who have come to expect no good to come from the present they live in. Both signal alternative possibilities. Both are most often dismissed as hallucinatory, colourful, unfocused imaginings of people on the wrong side of reasonable.

Mark, the New Testament gospel writer, also offered a call to resist the world as it was and to embrace an alternative way of being, the Way of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God. He wrote with the same urgency as the

Occupy voices, with the same cry for immediate action as that of David Suzuki and Michael Moore. Mark implored Christ's disciples to decide now, immediately, to follow Christ and turn away from what stifled life and oppressed joy. In this morning's passage Mark uses the apocalyptic genre of writing to press home the need to be attentive to the coming of God's realm; to be ready, alert, awake to the in-breaking of God's kingdom.

Apocalyptic is a Greek work meaning to 'uncover' or 'reveal'. It identifies a major strand of faith that emerged late in the development of the Old Testament – a theme that illustrates in three dimensional Technicolor the radical nature of the pending upheaval when the world as God intends it to be settles in. Springing from a time in Jewish history when the world seemed without hope and despair the only recourse to the sharp disappointment of possibilities, apocalyptic writings rallied the faithful, calling on them to watch and wait as God's intentions became realized in the world around them.

We can see the slippery slope of course – a slope leading towards quietism and detachment, a slide into sitting on our thumbs waiting for God to get about it. In the Occupy movements there is a wonderful blending between the expectation of a better way and an activism that might make space for that way. The movement has offered an unveiling of what's really going on. An exposing of injustice, of oppression, of scales tilted fully in favour of the haves and contrary to the have-nots. While many regard the Occupy movement with some bewilderment, if not disdain, there is no getting around the reality that in its original impetus, a truth was named, a rottenness unveiled, and deep dis-ease revealed. It was apocalyptic

literature in-carnate, in the flesh. Something is not right in the State of Wherever and we're not getting out of our tents until you notice. The Occupy movement joins our contemporary theology in understanding that there must be engagement between the will of God and the way of God's people. That each step and decision we take is a step and decision towards participating in the fulfillment of God's realm or a step away from the righteousness for all creation that is the profound yearning of God.

In Biblical times those who hoped in God were dismissed as no less unreasonable and irrational as many portray the participants in the Occupy movement. Theologian Walter Brueggemann writes this regarding those who watched and waited/those who watch and wait, on God: "This radical hope [among those who are powerless, who expect nothing more from the present world] appears absurd to people who still trust in the world, but such hope is indeed the work of people who have no other ground for hope." (Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith*, 8)

"Absurd to those who still trust in the world." *Vancouver Sun* business columnist Craig McInnes published an article yesterday headlined: "Occupy Xmas, or how to turn Christmas into a day of mourning." His argument is that to reduce consumerism during this season, to turn our back on rampant shopping and therefore increased production of goods we don't need and increased destruction of our environment by both producing and throwing out those goods, is to bring about recession, depression, a failed North American economy. He does somewhat patronizingly concede that; "We might all be better off with a less commercial Christmas, with paying more attention to the spiritual side of

holiday,” However, he warns, if we scale back too much, if we pay more than lip service to a reversal of our destructive consumption, we may engineer an economic apocalypse. “...poor sales may be a sign that the great engine of the American economy – the consumer – doesn’t have the horsepower to keep that country from falling back into recession. Canada could quickly follow. What a merry Christmas that would be.” (Craig McInnes, *Vancouver Sun*, Nov. 25, 2011, C2) Wow – recognizing that we live beyond our means, recognizing that we are destroying the planet with over consumption, responding to the good news of the gospel by reveling in the love of God rather than artificial warmth of the sales clerk – can bring about the financial ruin of North America. Sally Ritchie, vice-president of communications for the Retail Council of Canada, ups the rhetoric, the resistance to the resistance. She denounced ‘Occupy Christmas’ as an outrage that would threaten the livelihood of workaday Canadians....” saying “It’s a highly undemocratic sentiment, really,” That we heed the ancient voices who call us to a new possibility, a new world, a new hope is ‘highly undemocratic.’

Be awake, keep awake, keep watch. Even as we prepare for the birth of the baby Jesus we remember his entreaty to us as he neared his death – keep awake with me. As the sin of the world sought to extinguish his light, he called on us, and Mark calls on us again – keep awake! We are in the throws of an apocalyptic battle – the force of God’s incoming kingdom, the healing of creation, righteousness for all God’s children, versus an economy and a rhetoric that declares everything will collapse if we seek God’s goodness, if we trust God’s promise.

Keep awake, keep watch, be ready. As the light breaks in it exposes the complex webs in the corners of our lives, of our culture, of our world. The light unveils the truth – and history shows us that the world will resist the light and the truth. Business columnists extoll the consumer as the engine of stability; the gospel declares instead that the engine is Love. It is the living, loving God incarnate, enfleshed in the pregnant possibilities of a baby which drives our hearts, which sustains our hope, which assures the wellness of our world. Keep awake – it's going to be a rocky ride. The light comes again.